



TO: **W-2 Agencies**
RSS-funded Agencies
RMS-administering Clinics

FROM: Bojana Zorić Martinez, Director
Bureau of Refugee Programs
Division of Family and Economic Security
Department of Children and Families

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Office of Refugee Resettlement Waiver Extensions

BRP OPERATIONS MEMO			
No:	21-03		
DATE:	5/14/2021		
RCA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RHP	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
RMA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RMS	<input type="checkbox"/>
RSI	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RSS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
RYM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
W-2	<input type="checkbox"/>	WFTCP	<input type="checkbox"/>

CROSS REFERENCE:

- [BRP Operations Memo 20-20](#)
- [BWF Operations Memo 20-11](#)
- [Office of Refugee Resettlement \(ORR\) Policy Letter 20-03](#)
- [ORR Policy Letter 20-04](#)
- [ORR Policy Letter 20-06](#)
- [ORR Policy Letter 21-01](#)
- [ORR State Letter 99-17](#)
- [ORR Policy Letter 21-05](#)

EFFECTIVE DATE:

April 30, 2021

PURPOSE: The purpose of this memo is to communicate a summary of continued extensions to waivers that allow for various exceptions to ORR regulations. These waivers give the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and its refugee programs' contractors the necessary flexibility to continue to respond to the spread of COVID-19, and its impact on ORR-eligible populations.

BACKGROUND: [Policy Letters 20-04](#) and [20-03](#) initially introduced a series of waivers and regulatory exceptions to help address the various impacts of COVID-19. Those waivers first expired on September 30, 2020. [Policy Letter 20-06](#) extended the waivers through January 31, 2021, due to the continued impact of COVID-19, followed by [Policy Letter 21-01](#), which provided an additional extension through April 30, 2021. The opportunity to further extend these waivers was made possible with the most recent

publication of [Policy Letter 21-05](#), which offers waivers that will expire on September 30, 2021.

The details of the policy letters were summarized by DCF in [Operations Memo 20-20](#) and [Operations Memo 21-02](#). The same pertinent details are summarized below with updated dates and clarifying guidance related to documentation. Each of the waivers relax various conditions of eligibility and program requirements for Refugee Support Services (RSS), Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA), Refugee Medical Screenings (RMS), and ORR set-asides and discretionary grant programs (e.g. Refugee School Impact, Refugee Youth Mentoring, Refugee Health Promotion, and Services to Older Refugees).

These waivers are consistent with refugee policy objectives and will allow ORR eligible populations affected by COVID-19 to receive critical assistance and services. ORR will continue to assess the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on ORR eligible populations.

WAIVERS

1. Eligibility Determinations for ORR Benefits and Services

[Policy Letter 20-06](#) and [Policy Letter 21-01](#) extended the terms of this waiver on two separate occasions; [Policy Letter 21-05](#) furthermore extends the terms of this waiver through September 30, 2021 with no additional provisions. ORR program eligibility determinations may be made virtually if necessary and must be supported with a subsequent written declaration as soon as possible.

2. Refugee Cash Assistance and Conditions for Receipt of RCA

[Policy Letter 20-06](#) and [Policy Letter 21-01](#) extended the terms of this waiver on two separate occasions; [Policy Letter 21-05](#) furthermore extends the terms of this waiver through September 30, 2021 with no additional provisions. For those who became eligible and continue to be otherwise eligible for RCA on or after April 1, 2019, the eligibility period has been extended through September 30, 2021. As such, for clients who became eligible for RCA on or after February 1, 2021, the eligibility period will remain eight months.

The terms of the waiver detailed in [PL-21-01](#) pertaining to delays in Social Security Administration (SSA) appointments, which allow states to enroll clients into RCA where an agency can document that a client has not been able to successfully apply for a social security card, continue to apply.

ORR continues to waive the conditions for receipt of RCA, including referral to and enrollment in employment services, if such services cannot be accessed safely in accordance with public health guidance. In such instances, reasons for not accessing such services must be documented.

3. Refugee Medical Assistance Eligibility Period

[Policy Letter 20-06](#) and [Policy Letter 21-01](#) extended the RMA eligibility period on two separate occasions; [Policy Letter 21-05](#) furthermore extends the eligibility period through September 30, 2021 with no additional provisions. For those who became eligible and continue to be otherwise eligible for RMA on or after April 1, 2019, the eligibility period has been extended through September 30, 2021. As such, for clients who became eligible for RMA on or after February 1, 2021, the eligibility period will remain at eight months.

The terms of the waiver detailed in [PL-21-01](#) pertaining to delays in SSA appointments, which allow states to enroll clients into RMA where an agency can document that a client has not been able to successfully apply for a social security card, continue to apply.

4. Refugee Medical Screenings

[Policy Letter 20-06](#) and [Policy Letter 21-01](#) waived the 90-day requirement for Refugee Medical Screenings and allows the provision of medical screenings without prior determination of eligibility for Medicaid, CHIP, or RMA beyond the 90 days after a refugee's initial date of entry.

The terms allow for the waiver of relevant elements of [State Letter 99-17](#) upon request. Within the new parameters, RMA funds may be utilized for vaccinations regardless of when the clients received their refugee medical screening, as long as the vaccines are not covered by another federally funded program (e.g. Medicaid). In addition, this waiver authorizes the use of RMA funds to cover the cost of COVID-19 vaccinations, as long as it is not covered by another federally funded program.

[Policy Letter 21-05](#) further extends the provisions of this waiver through September 30, 2021.

5. Refugee Support Services Funding for Emergency and Other Assistance

ORR will continue to permit the use of RSS base funding for additional, immediate, and emergency services, such as transitional housing assistance and emergency payments to cover essential services such as utilities and housing, due to income loss from job disruption or loss related to COVID-19. These conditions will apply through September 30, 2021 and pertain to funds previously allocated. They do not include the provision of any additional funds, so ORR advises that such waivers are requested strategically and only after any and all other available emergency assistance has been requested. Agencies should first determine that the individuals seeking assistance have already received all available emergency assistance before providing RSS emergency assistance in order to maximize funding and services. ORR continues to authorize the use of RSS funding for supplying and distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies that mitigate the spread of COVID-19, which is a provision that was introduced with [Policy Letter 20-06](#).

6. Refugee Support Services Set Asides

The flexibility for RSS set aside funding, as detailed in [Policy Letter 20-06](#) and [Policy Letter 21-01](#), has been extended through September 30, 2021, by [Policy Letter 21-05](#).

7. Refugee Support Services Extended Eligibility Period

ORR will continue, through September 30, 2021, to waive upon request the 60-month eligibility period for RSS for the provision of support services to those in extreme circumstances (e.g., a client who risks eviction, a client who is unable to pay for heating during frigid winter months). This waiver includes the RSS set-aside programs and applies to all ORR eligible populations.

8. Provision of ORR Funded Services

States and provider agencies should continue to make all efforts to continue services to the highest degree possible utilizing online resources, online education, and virtual contacts, or other means that are consistent with the guidance of local public health entities, as previously detailed in [Policy Letter 20-06](#) and [Policy Letter 21-01](#).

CARES WORKER WEB (CWW)

For any eligibility or program requirement exceptions granted by these extended waivers, agencies should continue to utilize case comments to document the reason for the exception.

REPORTS

For any eligibility or program requirement exceptions granted by these extended waivers, agencies should continue to utilize comments sections in reports submitted to DCF for federal reporting purposes in order to document the reason for the exception.

TRAINING

No additional training will be required; agencies are encouraged to reach out to their DCF contacts in the Bureau of Refugee Programs (BRP) for guidance.

AGENCY ACTION

Agencies should ensure that program applicants and participants are informed of extended eligibility periods and waived program requirements. When enrolling and serving participants, agencies should discuss the finite time period during which these waivers are in effect.

CONTACTS

Questions regarding these waivers should be directed to the BRP:

Bojana Zorić Martinez (Bureau Director): bojana.zoricmartinez@wisconsin.gov
Ben York (Refugee Programs Section Manager): benjamin.york@wisconsin.gov
Amelia Salem: amelia.salem@wisconsin.gov
Anwar Sallumi: anwar.sallumi@wisconsin.gov
Natasa Torbica: natasa.torbica@wisconsin.gov
Rebekah Davis: rebekah.davis@wisconsin.gov
Tom Targos: tom.targos@wisconsin.gov

DCF/DFES/BRP/RPS/RD